PART TWO

Scarcity and Conflict
Introduction

In the light of the broad global trends discussed in the preceding section, we should not be surprised if there is a relationship between scarcity and internal and regional conflict. With population pressures building up in various parts of the globe, the struggle for resources intensifies and with the end of the cold war, we may expect to see old ethnic animosities and religious conflicts come to the surface with greater intensity, particularly in the poorer parts of the world. We have already seen this happening in Central America, Southeast Asia, Afghanistan, the Middle East, the Balkans, Africa, and the rimlands of the former Soviet Union.

The optimists argue that natural resources are not a finite entity that is steadily being depleted; they see the creation of new or modified resources that are the result of human inventions and labor, and they believe technology has an infinite capacity for solving the earth’s problems. They also have abiding faith in the resiliency of the earth itself and its human inhabitants. Just as Malthus was wrong in his predictions, so are today’s doomsayers. If the optimists are correct, the world will just be a more prosperous place with more “stuff” distributed to larger numbers of people. If they are wrong, as the contributors in this section argue, the human race may be in for more conflict and suffering if it does not change its course of the relentless pursuit of growth, accumulation, and waste.